

# Govt mulls regulating pre-school education [IN] <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Express India

**Source:** Express India

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 21 Apr 2009

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

The state government finally broke the silence over regularising pre-school education by holding a maiden meeting with representatives of pre-schools or balwadis and voluntary organisations at the SCERT office on Monday. This deliberation covered various issues like the need for government recognition to pre-schools, ideal teacher-student ratio, age limit for children, admission process, fees and qualification of pre-school teachers.

About 100 representatives of various pre-schools and voluntary organisations in Pune and Mumbai participated in the discussion. A common opinion was that fees of balwadis could be regulated if the government provides grants to these schools. Kalpana Gupte of Navin Marathi School said, "Fees should be proportionate to the facilities provided by the school."

Although the participants came up with varied views on the admission procedure for pre-schools, the question of how to select students from the large number of applicants still remained unanswered. While majority of schools conduct interviews of parents and students before admission, many others follow a random method of selecting students.

"Once a student is selected, he/she must undergo a medical check-up for the physical and psychological growth and to ensure that all vaccinations have been given," said pediatrician Satish Tamboli. However, interaction with parents is necessary in order to apprise them of the school policies, activities and so on.

As far as interviews of students and parents are concerned, most said that they are necessary to verify the details of the parents.

"However, it is unfair to take interviews for admission," the participants said.

When it came to the teacher-student ratio, a common opinion was about 20 children per teacher. However, Anupama Desai of SNDT home science college said, "The ideal ratio is 1:7. But considering the salaries of pre-school teachers in India, 1:20 is acceptable."

The participants were also unanimous about the minimum age limit of children going to balwadis. Kunda Vartak of Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh Pune said the Supreme Court's guideline that a child must be four-years old in LKG, five-years old in UKG and 6 years complete in class I must be strictly followed.

The participants stood divided on whether pre-schools should be recognised by the government or not. While some said that the government must restrict teaching in kindergarten only to play methods with no formal instructions involved, others who disagreed said that these schools must be given autonomy so that each one is free to decide their syllabus and activities.

While there is no official count of the number of pre-schools in the state, officials estimate that 90,000 such schools of English and Marathi medium are operating.

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- reprinted from Express India

**Region:** Asia <sup>[2]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/04/govt-mulls-regulating-pre-school-education> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/asia> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>